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ABSTRACT

International graduate assistants pose questions for university administration. A study used ethnography of communication to examine the Chinese culture that Chinese graduate assistants bring to the United States classrooms, especially the culture pertaining to communication in the classrooms. Chinese graduate assistants speak from the code of honor in the United States classrooms: the "instructor-centered speaking." But they cannot avoid the influence of the United States classroom culture, which requires instructors to speak from the code of dignity. Chinese graduate assistants have the speaking "conflict" in the United States classrooms. Contains 18 references. (Author/RS)

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CONSTRUCT THE CULTURE FROM THE CLASSROOM SPEAKING: ETHNOGRAPHY OF CHINESE GRADUATE ASSISTANTS' SPEAKING IN THE U.S.CLASSROOMS.

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Abstract

International graduate assistants pose questions for university administration. This paper is an attempt to study Chinese culture that Chinese graduate assistants bring to the U.S classrooms, especially the culture pertaining to communication in the classrooms. Chinese graduate assistants speak from the code of honor in the U.S classrooms: the "instructor-centered speaking." But they can not avoid the influence of the U.S classroom culture, which requires instructors to speak from the code of dignify. Chinese graduate assistants have the speaking "conflict" in the U.S classrooms.

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CONSTRUCT THE CULTURE FROM THE CLASSROOM SPEAKING: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF CHINESE GRADUATE ASSISTANTS' SPEAKING IN THE U.S. CLASSROOMS.

> "The ethnography of speaking, then, consists of hearing and representing distinctive ways of speaking in particular speech communities. An ethnography of speaking is a report of a culture, as that culture thematizes communication and of the ways that culture is expressed in some historical situation."
>
> —— Gerry Philipsen

Every year, the U.S. campuses have increasing international students, international graduate assistants, and even international faculty members. People can feel the striking effects of multicultural trend in academia. From 1996 to 1997, 457, 984 international students enrolled at the U.S. colleges and universities (Desruisseau, 1997). International students account for 3.2 percent of all post-secondary enrollments. The 5 top countries of origin are Japan, China, Korea, India, and Taiwan. Among these international students, international graduate assistants bring questions to university administration. The exact number of international graduate assistants at the U.S. colleges are not available, but numerous studies focusing on international graduate assistants call people's attention to this unique cultural phenomena on the U.S. college campuses (Ard, 1989; Mestenhauser et al., 1980; Plakans, 1997; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1991; Tyler, 1992; Yook & Albert, 1999; Yule & Hoffman, 1990; Yule & Hoffman, 1993; Williams, 1992).

These studies have largely focused on the question of effective education. Much of the literature is concerned with the evaluation and training programs for international

graduate assistants and international graduate assistants' performance in the U.S. classrooms (Louis, 1998). Some studies deal with the ways to analyze and evaluate the training programs (e.g., Tyler, 1992). Some suggest new methods of training international graduate assistants (Ard, 1989; Yule & Hoffman, 1990). Some other studies focus on the improvement of international graduate assistants' English pronunciation and their pedagogy skills in the U.S. classrooms (e.g., Yule & Hoffman, 1993).

These studies all attempt to find or improve procedures by which international assistants can be "trained effectively, teach effectively, and receive high evaluations from their undergraduate students" (Louis, 1998, p. 5). Their approaches are to help international gradate assistants adapt to the U.S. college culture better. Rarely do studies focus on assistants themselves in regarding to their experience, especially the culture they bring to the U.S. classrooms. The research in this paper is an attempt to study Chinese culture that Chinese graduate assistants bring to the U.S. classrooms, especially the culture pertaining to communication in the classrooms.

Many studies about Chinese students on the U.S. campuses also adopt what I would like to call "adaptation approach" that is similar to that in much of literature about international graduate assistants as general. Some studies are about Chinese students' and scholars' marginal psychological states, including their feelings of status loss, spiritual emptiness, cultural footlessness, and restricted communication (e.g., Hobbs, 1982). Some studies are about the meaning of the cross-cultural adaptation (e.g., Moorman, 1988). Some are about Chinese graduate students' adaptation to different U.S. speaking patterns in their academic life (e.g., Ye, 1992; Yu, 1997). These studies about the cultural adaptation of Chinese students touch less on their native culture in the U.S. classrooms.

In this study, I am concerned with how Chinese graduate assistants' speech behaviors in the U.S classrooms codify Chinese culture and in what way Chinese graduate assistants coordinate the cultural differences in their speaking when they face the U.S. students in the classrooms. I use ethnography of communication as both the method of collecting data and the interpretative approach to uncover Chinese graduate assistants' speaking pattern and construct the culture pattern in this particular speaking group.

Background of the Study

As a large research university in the Midwest, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale usually admits 1, 500 to 2, 000 international students each academic year and among them a lot of international graduate assistants go to the classrooms to handle lower-level course sections. With 22, 320 students enrolled in 1998-1999, the University admitted 1, 342 international students and hired 402 of them as graduate teaching or research assistants (SIUC Admission and Records). With 139 enrollments, Chinese (from the People's Republic of China) is the second largest group of international students at SIUC. What makes Chinese students unique for international graduate assistant study is that almost all of them have assistantships, either as research assistants or teaching assistants. Otherwise, they almost can not get visa from the U.S. immigration officers in China. As non-native speakers, their communicative behaviors that codify sharp cultural differences may not be understood by their U.S. students even if they speak fluent English. Sometimes, it is even worse that the U.S. students may outpour anger and frustration as Eunkyog Lee Yook and Rosita D. Albert (1999) reviewed in their study of international graduate assistants.

Method

My study have two periods. The first was four months from February to May in 1999. The second period was three months from November in 1999 to January in 2000. I used participation observation and interviewing as the techniques of data collection. Altogether, I had twelve participants who were graduate assistants from various disciplines. I had in-depth interviews with six of them. I followed the model set up by Gerry Philipsen (1992) in his study of Teamstervillers' speaking to analyze data. From the field notes of participants' communicative activities in classrooms, their statements in interviews, and tape-recorded verbal behaviors, I tried to formulate the speaking pattern and infer the culture in the speaking pattern. In return, the culture was tested by the data.

"Instructor-Centered Speaking" in the Classrooms

It was frustrating when I tried to code my data and could not figure out any systematic pattern. These Chinese graduate assistants all spoke fluent English although some of them had accents. They all controlled their classes well. Students came to the class and after one hour got out of classroom, quiet and peaceful as they attended the U.S. instructors' classes. After I read Carbaugh's study (1989) about different cultural terms for talk, much of my data began to make sense. The messages from the terms for talk can be about communication, sociality, and personhood (Carbaugh, 1989, p. 103). This enlightened me to start with the interviews paying much attention to those metacommunicative vocabulary that might tell me about the way Chinese graduate assistants chose to speak to their students, about how they related themselves to their students, and about what kind of persons they were in the classrooms. Those vocabulary

"thematize[s] the means of communication and the meanings that these means have to those who use and experience them" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 143).

My participants used "instructor-centered speaking" to describe the sociality, the personhood, and the communicative behaviors they had in the U.S. classrooms. On the one hand, "instructor-centered speaking" indicated the "distance" with the students. In participant C's words, "you keep a large distance with your students and stay in the center of the classrooms." The "distance" could be best illustrated by my field notes of participant D's nonverbal codes in his lecture:

> After turning off the lights, D turned to the blackboard and wrote down the concepts he was going to discuss in this section. Some students ducked their heads doing their own work, some looked around, and some talked with each other. After writing the terms on the blackboard, D turned around and pointed to the blackboard: "Basically, you may know some of the concepts from their literary meanings." Then, he turned on the overhead projector and pointed to the screen with his back to the students. He directed students to draw pictures with logo language. Then, he bent down to the computer screen and typed the operation orders. Looking at the screen, he explained how to operate it.

D did not have any verbal or nonverbal ritual to mark the beginning of the class. Instead, he wrote down concepts on the blackboard. He had his back to the students. The students looked around, ducked their heads, and talked with each other. Then, D kept referring to the backboard. He did not face the students. Later, D was busy with turning on the overhead projector, pointing to the screen, and inputting operation orders. D did not look at the students in this process. In the interview, D commented his nonverbal codes in the classroom:

> As an instructor, you keep distance with the students. You do not look at them directly. You know, once you look at them, there is a kind of emotional interaction. You can't keep distance again. Me, I try to avoid facing them. I just want to get the lecture done. I get out of there. They get out of there. We keep it as serious as possible.

Avoiding facing the students became a way for D to maintain the "distance." Besides, my participants also talked about the way they addressed the students, which is another aspect of their "distance" in the classrooms. They preferred to address their students by their full names. In participant E's words, they could keep the relation "formal" and maintain the "distance" better. The following is from my field notes about participant E's class when she, a journalism graduate assistant, handed back students' quiz grades:

> E walked toward the front desk in the classroom. She announced: "I got your quiz grades. Come and get them back." From a box, she took out papers. She began to read names loudly: "Jason O-O-Olin-Olinger. Amy Brown, not here. Laura Williams. Here you are. Uh, uh. Philip Poto-Potopinski. Water Lynch, not here. Megan Brown..." She had difficulty in pronouncing some names. One student was not sure about his name and asked twice. Students walked to the front and got the grades one by one.

Sometimes, E's calling of names did not communicate well. In the interview, E thought that calling full names "really get[s] the distance with the students and maintain the relation formal like what instructors do in China." So, even after six weeks of that semester, she still addressed students by their full names.

As one component of "instructor-centered" speaking," the "distance" with the students helped Chinese graduate assistants maintain the "center" status. They used the nonverbal code, "avoiding facing the students," and addressed the students by their full names to get the distance from the students. The other aspect of "instructor-centered speaking" is their "authoritative talk" in the classrooms.

In the interviews, my participants talked much about "speaking tones" and "sentence patterns" in the classrooms. They viewed them as one of the keys to understand Chinese graduate assistants' speaking in the U.S. classrooms. The following is a part of my field notes about a computer lab class:

> Today, you will learn to draw a car and sunflower with logo program. There is a file called scorel.doc. Open this file. There is a lot of information. Click here and download to logo. Oh, I forget one thing. Next time, I mean next assignment, you should bring good disks and label disks. So documents should be safer. I got three persons. My computer didn't read their disks. And ...and, now, start navigation and go to web page. You need to download this file, too. Everybody got this file. Go back to logo and be ready to draw the car.

In the above lecture, we may find the distinguished feature about the sentence pattern is that there are no subjects. Participant B started the sentences with only verbs, such as "open," "click," "download," "start," "go back," and "be ready." These imperative sentence patterns are, in participate A's term, "authoritative talk." When we read the sentence, "You should bring good disks and label disks," we can see that B used "authoritative talk" and he wanted the students to do what they should do. We can also see the "authoritative talk" from participant A's explanation of the assignment in his speech class:

> Did you analyze the dialogue? What is wrong with the dialogue? No, not all is that. The problem is still the same. So, that's why I want to give feasible solutions to the problem. For example, one thing which is impossible is that your don't tend to be very picky. Don't read [this dialogue] very emotionally. Don't do that. But you have to do something to the dialogue. So it's not so damaging to the relationship. Use your mind and eyes. Before analyzing and seeing your improvement in the dialogue, I want to clarify your understanding of some terms.

In A's lecture, we can also read these verbs which start sentences, "do," and "use." The imperative sentence pattern is still there. Furthermore, we can read A's "authoritative talk" in the sentence pattern like "Don't tend to..." "Don't read..." and "Don't do that." A concluded this part of the lecture with the sentence: "I want to clarify your understanding of some terms." In this sentence, we may feel the "absolute" tone. In the interview, A described this speaking as "You do this. You do that." He offered a good example to my question about how he began a class generally:

> Good morning! Today, we're going to do this. Then open your books to page 100. Now, let's talk about whatever. You see a picture here. What this chapter means is this and that. This kind of oral style: You do this. You do that.

A's example echoed what I observed in the classrooms. We can find "authoritative talk": "Open your books to page 100" and "now let's talk about whatever." We can also read this in sentences: "You see a picture here" and "What this chapter means is this and that." He concluded his example with "You do this. You do that." It is just another version of "Don't do that." Participant B also told me that he "likes to use authoritative talk." He illustrated in the interview as: "Ok, I am the authority. You just follow me." He did not like to teach students "stuff" of which he was not sure. Since he taught sure things, he would like to use "authoritative talk." Verbally, he offered me his favorite way to conclude a lecture: "Nothing else. That's all."

My participants attributed the "instructor-centered speaking" to their Chinese cultural background. In Chinese culture, instructors enjoy supreme authority. Students cannot get across the line between instructors and students. Instructors are the holy saints to disseminate knowledge. Instructors are the "center" of a classroom. Students are supposed to absorb information passively. Instructors are regarded perfect. Their knowledge should not be questioned. My participants felt that they could not "forget" or "avoid" their native style of teaching and the concept of teaching. Besides, teaching in Chinese culture follows the "teaching-learning model." In this model, teachers tell students that they should do this or that. B's comment can illustrate the relation between the speaking and the cultural:

> I think I am still strongly influenced by my Chinese background. I think I will change in a couple of years. But I'm not sure. I think the teaching-learning model is very good for students. This is the typical Chinese teaching style. You keep distance from the students. You teach them and they listen. Of course, we also

> have discussions. But personally, I don't like to teach students stuff that I'm not sure. In that way, I will be embarrassed. As a teacher, you should teach students right things. What they come for is certain knowledge. They don't come for questions. Of course, I am teaching those basics. I am very sure about my stuff. There is no need to discuss whether 3 plus 2 makes 5. Certainly, I will make mistakes about those basics. Step by step, I will realize the mistake. Of course, I won't admit my mistake. It is impossible to admit mistakes before your students. You are up there and they are down here. You will lose your face. I will find some excuses that the students can accept.

B was not sure whether he was going to change. But the "teaching-learning model" influenced his speaking in the classroom. He was very sure about his "stuff" as he was sure that 3 plus 2 makes 5. Even if he made mistakes, he would not admit them. There was a distance between instructors and the students: "You are up there and they are down here." He thought that it is impossible to admit mistakes before students. "You will lose your face." The "teaching-learning" model, avoidance of embarrassment, distance with the students, and face values construct B's concept about "instructor-centered speaking" in the classrooms. As A said in the interview, he had a " a control of every thing" with this way of speaking. He just told students that "they should do this or that." Students took notes being "very peaceful and quiet."

Speaking Conflict in the Classrooms

In contrast to the "instructor-centered speaking," my participants also felt that they had to employ more "more polite" and "discussion" speaking in the U.S. classrooms. There is a "conflict" in their way of speaking. They viewed this conflict as "a struggle between two things." My participants attributed the necessity of utilizing "more polite" and "discussion" speaking to the U.S. student-centered teaching style and their "linguistic incompetence." First, F told me that the teacher-student relation is "reversed" in the U.S.:

> I feel strongly about the relation between teachers and students. I feel the relation is somewhat reversed. In China, teachers are the No. 1 boss and

> students are just obedient to teachers. Here in the U.S., students are the boss. They pay money. Teachers should satisfy students. So teachers usually have a different way of speaking. Sometimes they use discussion sentence pattern: "Would you like to do something?" "Please... "or "Could you..." (Translated from Chinese [1])

Here in the U.S., students are the "No. 1 boss." In F's mind, teachers should "satisfy" students who "pay money." So teachers should have "a different way of speaking." A termed teachers as "servants" who should be "worthy of the money they are paid." A held the idea that teachers should try to understand students and use more "polite" or "flexible" speaking in a "student-centered" education model.

Furthermore, A traced this model back to the U.S. democracy: "This is a democratic society. Students have rights to be treated as individuals. They have rights to discuss with, question, or even challenge teachers. Teachers should use more polite and discussion or flexible speaking."

On the other hand, my participants talked about the lack of language context when they recalled their English-learning experience. From this lack of context, they had "the weakness" with language usage. They felt strongly that they could not speak and understand English as well as they should when they taught in English. This weakness made them very nervous when they taught native speakers the first time. As participant A said, the "linguistic incompetence" brought about the lack of confidence in the U.S. classrooms. So they tended to use more "polite" and "discussion" speaking. Of course, the student-centered teaching method also pushed them to use that way of speaking. Participant A explained to me about his English-learning experience:

> I think the most difficult thing is that you don't have environment. You don't have natural situation in which you can adapt your ears and mouth to practice. And then you don't use the language. It's a kind of efforts and then you ignore them. It's a waste of time. You learn and forget. You learn and forget again. I

> think we just don't have language context. At that time, I dreamed often of being in a real land and listening to real language, watching movies. I could use language with totally different concept from learning language.

A referred to the lack of "environment," "natural situation," and "language context" as "the most difficult thing" in the process of studying English. Of course, without environment, it was hard to have opportunity to use language. In A's term, you did not have opportunities to "adapt your ears and mouth to practice." People made "efforts" and then ignored them. So A concluded that it was a "waste of time." Certainly, he dreamed of being in a real language context where he could "listen to real language" and "watching movies." A's "dream" about "a real land" and "real language" could also be illustrated by participant F's "weird" feeling when he taught Chinese students in English:

> I also taught computer in English since we had a lot of computer textbooks written in English. I felt weird to talk to Chinese students in English. But here in the U.S., it is very natural to speak English with my U.S. students. I just imagine that I were an American. (Translated from Chinese)

F's "natural feeling" in the U.S. was in sharp contrast to his "weird" feeling in China. So I might say that language context plays a very important role in the learning experience of these Chinese graduate assistants. In China, the lack of language context brought about "the weakness" and " the difficult thing" with language usage. It is understandable that without language context, A felt it "a waste of time" and F "weird" to speak English.

Next, my participants related "the weakness" and "the difficult thing" to their "nervousness" in the first class when they taught native speakers in English. A came to the U.S. and had no idea that he would teach independently. He talked about his first class as some experience he perhaps could never forget:

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> I worried a lot. Of course, very nervous. It was totally new experience. It's just natural. You are a non-native speaker and teach native speakers. They are not general speakers, kindergarten-age speakers. They are college students. And you are not teaching general natural science. You are teaching speech communication as a non-native speaker to native speakers. All the factors could make you nervous. Almost I couldn't sleep the night, the night before the first class. I was thinking about: "How can I do that?" That was experience I perhaps could never forget. I dressed up. It was totally pure business dress. Very formal in the morning. I was outside the classroom. I held my breath thinking about how to open my mouth at the very beginning. How could I begin the very first sentence in speaking to the students?

A's "new experience" made him "very nervous." The new experience was summarized by one sentence: "A non-native speaker teaches native speakers in English." Maybe A's confession to the students about his possible English "incompetence" could indicate his "nervousness" and "worries" better: "English is my second language. Probably I will have difficulty understanding your English. And I may also have problems expressing myself in English. So I have to learn from you sometimes." Participant F's experience of using English to teach native speakers in an international school in China also echoed this nervousness. In his talk, he just used "nervous," "tough," and "worries." F even said that he might have "wrong grammar, wrong sentence structures, wrong words, or wrong pronunciations" (Translated from Chinese) Particularly, F talked about the problems when he tried to understand students. Here in the U.S., F still felt nervous about listening:

> The only thing that I feel nervous about is listening. I find that people's English, especially Black English, has a very strange accent and fast speaking speed. They make me very uncomfortable. Some students ask a lot of questions. But sometimes I can't understand them and can't give responses. I have to make them repeat. (Translated from Chinese)

D also talked specially about the "difficult thing" to understand students:

> For me, the most difficult thing is not to explain my ideas. I have no problems with that. It is not to give assignments. No. It's the understanding of students'

> questions and their expressions of ideas. It's difficult to understand students. That's the most difficult thing.

For D, it was most difficult to understand students. So, besides the new experience in the U.S., speaking English and listening to English also contributed a lot to "the nervousness."

In the participant observations, my participants' frequent usage of transitional words can explain "the nervousness." The following is a part of participant C's lecture.

> And open the Access. Run the Access and open the file. And... download the file. And I forgot one thing. I included your grades of the assignments into your yellow pages. And actually you can find them there. You have any questions and you can come to me. Uh, uh... And after that, open the file. Actually, the textbook publisher provides this file. And that is someone else's database. And you open the first table. You can find a lot of personal information: names, and ages, and addresses, and number of people...etc."

In this small part of his lecture, C had eight "ands" and one "actually" as his transitional words. He almost began every sentence with "and." According to my field notes, he stopped two or three seconds after each "and." In the interview, C explained that the frequent use of transitional words "wins time" to think and then "covers his worries or nervousness." With transitional words, he could speak "a little bit more fluently and coherently."

Finally, my participants related "the weakness" and "the difficult thing" to their speaking in the U.S. classrooms. A summarized the relation.as the result of being "not linguistically competent" in the classrooms:

> Linguistically, I am not competent. So I am not confident. But in China, you do that. You do this. That's it. Here. I think my language should be more polite: " Could you please..." "If you will..." "If it is not too much trouble, can you do that." I understand that is the American way of expression. But I do that not because it's American style but because I am not so sure about myself.

A was not sure about himself. So he wanted to use more "polite" language, which was featured by these sentence patterns: "Could you please..." "If you will..." and "If it is not too much trouble, can you do...." For a further step, A claimed that he did that not because it was American ways but because he was not sure about himself.

However, from the analysis in their "instructor-centered speaking," we know that these Chinese graduate assistants could not tear themselves away from their native classroom culture. So there is a conflict. In A's words, it is a conflict between the "conscious [the U.S. student-centered style] and unconscious [Chinese instructor-centered speaking] levels." From the contrast of the two opposite ways of speaking, we can see the "conflict" as A stated in his talk:

> You do this. You do that. This type of oral type, somehow, is contradictory to American way of teaching and communication pattern. On the conscious level, you try to be an American. On the unconscious level, you are still a Chinese. You struggle between the two things when you try to adapt to the new culture. That's difficult. You have to struggle against your native style. You almost remind yourself constantly to forget that style. You don't feel at home. But when you try to adapt. You realize the difficulty.

There is a "conflict" between "conscious" and "unconscious" level. On the one hand, it is "instructor-centered speaking." On the other hand, it is "more polite" and "discussion" speaking. Between them, there is a "struggle between the two things."

Conclusion

Gerry Philipsen (1997) defines a speech code as " a system of socially structured symbols and meaning, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct" (p. 126). If we view the rules, premises, and meanings of Chinese graduate assistants' "instructor-centered speaking" and the speaking "conflict" as a speech code, we will understand more about the cultural resources of this speaking Chinese graduate assistants

had in the U.S. classrooms. I will use the five propositions of speech codes as the framework to analyze the speech code.

First, in the connection with their U.S. students, Chinese graduate assistants are a distinctive group. They have a quite different culture, which has their native culture as the root and at the same time enjoy more or less the host culture in the U.S. When this culturally distinctive group uses speaking to achieve the connection with the U.S. students in the classrooms, there is a distinctive speech code in their speaking.

The substance of the speech code centers around Chinese graduate assistants' view about who they are and how they should constitute the social relations that enable them to be persons in the classrooms. In Philipsen's words (1997), it is about a "culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric" (p. 138). In the interviews with those graduate assistants, they said they were "instructors" and their students were "students." They adopted the "teaching-learning model" in the connection with the U.S. students. In one participant's words, "we teach and they listen." In the connection with the students, one participant said: "Personally, I don't like to teach students stuff that I'm not sure. In that way, I will be embarrassed. So I do not have too many discussions." They used "instructor-centered speaking." On the other hand, my participants also realized that the host culture influenced the connection they were trying to achieve with the students: "Here in the U.S., students are the No. 1 boss. They pay money. Teachers should satisfy students." In speaking, they felt a "conflict" between their "instructor-centered speaking" and "polite" or "discussion" speaking.

In their speaking in the classrooms, a clear and obvious pattern kept appearing: the "distance" with the students and "authoritative talk." "Open this file." "Click here and

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download to logo." "Bring good disks and label disks." The speech code existed in their speaking in the U.S. classrooms.

The meanings of speaking come from their metalinguistic interpretation in the interviews. They thought that they were teachers. They should teach students "right things." If they were not sure, they would not teach. One participant said: "They (students) come for certain knowledge. They don't come for questions. Here in SIUC, I seldom use discussion tone. I use absolute and definite sentence pattern." In the connection with the U.S. students, my participants insisted that teacher teach students "right thing" and "certain knowledge." That is how they constructed the meanings of the "distance" and their "authoritative talk" in the classrooms.

Last, my participants explained how the discursive force was achieved in the connection with the U.S. students by the labeling, interpreting, explaining, evaluating their own communicative acts (Philipsen, 1997). They talked about the "authoritative talk." One participant talked how he understood his speaking in the classrooms: "I think I am still strongly influenced by my Chinese background. I think the teaching-learning model is very good for students. This is the typical Chinese style…You use absolute tones and definite sentence patterns. You show you authority. Even I make a mistake. I won't admit my mistake. It is impossible to admit mistakes before your students. You will lose your face." This discursive force from the belief in the authority of teacher can predict, explain, and control the format of discourse about the communicative conducts for a Chinese graduate assistant in the U.S. classrooms.

In my study, I noticed the way of speaking that Chinese graduate assistants had is the "instructor-centered" speaking that has "distance" and "authoritative talk" as the two

elements. Their native concept about teacher and teaching which constructs a "teaching-learning" model defines "instructor-centered speaking." On the other hand, my participants also realized the change of the teaching style in the U.S. The U.S. democracy foreshadows the "democratic climate" in the classroom. Instructors should activate "relaxed" class culture and "engage" students to various in-class activities. Of course, students "pay money" and they should be "satisfied." Instructors have to "listen to what students like" and utilize "more polite" tones and "discussion" speaking. Besides, my participants thought that they were not "competent" linguistically and "not sure about [themselves]." The lack of "confidence" also added to their attempt to use "polite" and "dissuasion" speaking.

The conflict between two kinds of speaking can be explained by the differences between two speech codes: a code of honor and a code of dignity (Philipsen, 1992). First, in a code of honor, "the individual is conceived a role or character, a persona" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 109). An individual is defined by social attitude. In the classrooms, Chinese graduate assistants assumed the role of "instructor" and their students the role of "student." Instructors stayed at the center of a classroom. Instructors teach and students listen. Second, society exists before the individual. Like players, people just fulfill the need of the whole drama. "And that drama is more important than any single character who struts about the stage for a particular moment" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 109). My participants used "teaching-learning" model to analogize the social world they had in the classrooms. On the stage of classrooms, they kept the "distance" with the students. They "just got the lecture done" and "got out of there." Students listened to them and after that "got out of there too." Third, in code of honor, communication functions to "coordinate

interpersonal activity, to allocate individuals to their spaces in the scheme of things, and to reinforce the social order as hierarchically organized" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 109). My participants viewed their speaking as "authoritative talk," which made sure they taught "absolute stuff." They also addressed students by their full names. That helped them to maintain the distance. They were "up there" and students were "down here." Their speaking reinforced the roles and the hierarchy in a classroom.

In contrast, my participants could not avoid the impact from the host culture. In one participant's words, "[t]his is a democratic society." In this society, "[s]tudents have rights to be treated as individuals" and "[t]hey have rights to discuss with, question, or even challenge teachers." Here, the code of honor switches to the code of dignity, which is "concerned with the person qua person, as someone who is made up of unique feelings, ideas, and attitudes" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 113). Speaking should elaborate individual intent and will. My participants complaint the lack of "environment," "natural situation," and-"language context," which led to their weakness with English speaking. They worried about their individual quality of being a teacher in the U.S. classrooms. They concerned themselves before the classroom. Of course, "students have rights to be treated as individuals." This clearly explains how the individual person "is existentially and morally prior to society" in the U.S. classrooms (Philipsen, 1992, p. 114). In the dignity code, speaking functions to express individual intent and will. My participants felt the need to use "polite" and more "discussion" speaking. This is to pay respect to the code of dignity. There should be a dialogue rather than a lecture.

Chinese graduate assistants spoke from the code of honor, which codified the "social constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules" regarding to their

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communicative behaviors in the U.S. classrooms (Philipsen, 1992, p. 126). But they also felt the need to switch to the code of dignity because of the host cultural impact and their "weakness" with English speaking. The conflict is from two different speech codes.

Although it is not the focus of this research to consider the U.S. community's responses to Chinese graduate assistants' speaking, I would like to note that in my participant observations there were some misunderstandings. Some U.S. students either did not follow instructions or even satirized Chinese graduate assistants' speaking by mocking: " Let's do this. Let's do that." As Eunkyong Lee Yook and Rosita D. Albert (1999) reviewed theories of attributions of responsibility to explain the accented English of international teaching assistants, I also hope that this ethnographical unpack of the culture behind the "authoritative talk," "distance," and the speaking "conflict" will redirect the U.S. communities' cognition and emotion in a sympathetic and understanding way.

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